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# Trade Union Annual Report 2026

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**Report being considered by:** Schools' Forum

**Date of Meeting:** 15 June 2026

**Report Author:**

**Item for:** Discussion/Comment **By** All Forum Members

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## 1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 To outline the work of the Teaching Trade Unions to Schools' Forum.

## 2. Recommendation

2.1 That Schools' Forum note the report.

Is the Schools' Forum required to make a decision as part of this report or subsequent versions due to be considered later in the meeting cycle?	
Yes: <input type="checkbox"/>	No: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

## 3. Introduction and Background

As of 18.5.26, the STPRB's recommendations have not been released. This in spite of a promise by the education secretary to publish by the end of April so that schools can sort their budgets out promptly without the endless delays and last day of term arrival of decisions in previous years. A leak in The Times last week<sup>1</sup> suggests that, whilst this year's potential offer of 3.5% may be in line with the current rate of inflation, the anticipated rises by the autumn term will wipe this out. It is also expected that this would mean that only another 3% pay increase would accrue over the following 2 years as part of the recommended 6.5% 3 year deal that the DfE proposed to the STRB. However, the fundamental problem is that it looks like the deal will be unfunded. This represents another real terms cut in overall funding for schools. The IFS annual report on school funding states the following: "Public spending on education has also fallen as a share of national income, from about 5.6% of national income in 2010–11 down to about 4.1% in 2024–25. This equals the historic lows seen in the late 1990s, late 1980s and mid 1960s. There has been no long-run increase in the share of national income devoted to public spending on education, despite rises in post-compulsory education participation over the long run."<sup>2</sup> Add to this the SEN funding crisis and the increased expectations of the White

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<sup>1</sup> [Teacher pay deal set to fall well below inflation. Expect more strikes](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Annual report on education spending in England: 2025–26 | Institute for Fiscal Studies](#)

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Paper with its 400 million (expected to not touch the sides), then education is in as parlous a state as it has been for many years.

Unless the fundamental model of how governments choose to see funding for public services as an investment, rather than as spending which has to be balanced against self imposed fiscal rules and the tyranny of the bond and banking sectors, then it is difficult to see anything other than further managed decline being the norm.

NEU are moving to ballot for strike action in the Autumn.<sup>3</sup> This will include Support members and support staff in GMB, Unite and Unison may also be balloted. It is believed that this will also be the case with the NASUWT and NAHT. Supportive noises have been made by ASCL without any direct call for action as yet. This notwithstanding, it is expected that school leaders will be more supportive of strike action by staff in these unions than last time and this could prove pivotal in any industrial dispute.

There is some good news from the NFER annual report on the Education Workforce<sup>4</sup> which indicates there has been an increase in staffing, but a fall in support staff. Workload measures are having some impact, including the flexible working changes, but these still often compare unfavourably to other countries of similar size and GDP.

### 3.1 Casework

Facility time enables trained and elected local officers to support schools and members in a variety of ways. The NEU has the highest density of membership across the LA. Some head teachers are members of the NEU, but most belong to NAHT or ASCL. Membership amongst NASUWT has fallen. Support staff can be members of the NEU, but they have no collective bargaining rights unlike those members in Unison, Unite or GMB. Support staff union membership is, however, relatively low.

Where a school does not contribute to facility time, certain restrictions in the ability to cover those workplaces apply. There are only reps in less than a third of schools. Heads are encouraged to seek to establish a rep and their workplace, but members are mostly reluctant to do so owing to perceived workload or fear that they will be viewed negatively by management. This does mean that the facility pot is important to maintain as much support as possible given most workplaces are lacking in reps or, where they do exist, reps who are fully trained.

Please see appendices Letter to Heads of schools who do not contribute to facilities.

### 3.2 III Health and Absence Management

We continue to see high levels of absence related to workload and stress. The TES Wellbeing Report 2026<sup>5</sup> relates to this and also offers useful insight into alleviating some of the issues which lead to staff absence. The key drivers of stress are workload and pupil behaviour. Issues around pupil violence have also increased both locally and nationally.

Useful guidance from HSE exists around what staff should expect from workplaces to protect them against violence at work.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> [NEU to launch a formal ballot for strike action | National Education Union](#)

<sup>4</sup> [The Education Workforce in England: Summary Report 2026 - NFER](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Tes Wellbeing Report 2026 | Tes](#)

<sup>6</sup> [violence-at-work-a-guide-for-employers.pdf](#)

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Since COVID, many workplaces have begun using HEPA filters. There is strong and accumulating evidence that absence rates amongst both staff and students in schools where these filters have been installed are falling. This has obvious advantages for both costs and learning.

Tools for Healthy Schools<sup>7</sup> has a useful calculator which schools can use to estimate the potential benefits of installing HEPA filters.

SAMHE (Schools Air Quality Monitoring for Health and Education) also provides some compelling evidence. In London, the Schools Filters Programme<sup>8</sup> is combatting pollution by installing filters and countering the potential learning damage done by fumes in urban or industrial areas.

Hertfordshire LA has installed HEPA filters across all 63 of its primaries<sup>9</sup> in collaboration with SAMHE<sup>10</sup>

Unions would urge both the authority and schools to consider a cost benefit analysis of rolling out a similar programme.

### **3.3 Malicious and Vexatious Complaints**

Sadly, these continue to be a major bugbear for both staff members and leaders who have to deal with them. In collaboration with the LA, the NAHT and the NEU have set up a working party of school leaders to try and address how complaints of this nature can be addressed and mitigated. Such complaints often lead to prolonged, stressful investigations which cause absence and occasionally resignation. They take up an inordinate amount of time which could be better spent focussing on what children need in the classroom and are a major distraction from this primary purpose.

### **3.4 Capability and Appraisal**

Unions emphasise again that appraisal policies should have a clear interim review under the no alarms no surprises approach so that performance management flags the need for capability at the earliest possible stage. Pay rises should be automatic unless a member of staff is on capability as agreed in the STPCD. It is also important that any informal capability interventions are not conflated with appraisal.

### **3.5 Disciplinary**

The number of disciplinaries has increased. We are seeing more cases of younger teachers often making poor judgement calls in classroom management which results in parental complaint. In a profession where a 2018 TALIS<sup>11</sup> survey revealed that teachers in England were the youngest in Europe averaging 38 years old in comparison to the European average of 44 (and this is probably much lower in England now given it is 8 years out of date), it is perhaps not surprising that errors emerge as a result of lack of experience. A February 2026 report by QE Insights<sup>12</sup> also offers some revealing data on

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<sup>7</sup> [coschools.org.uk/CHEPAcalculator](https://coschools.org.uk/CHEPAcalculator)

<sup>8</sup> [School Filters Programme | London City Hall](#)

<sup>9</sup> [What we're doing across Hertfordshire](#)

<sup>10</sup> [SAMHE+HSVP | SEI](#)

<sup>11</sup> [TALIS 2018 research](#)

<sup>12</sup> [How does teaching in England compare internationally?](#)

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the workforce demographic in England compared to international settings: “27.6% of primary school teachers and 19% of secondary teachers in the UK are under 30 – the [highest proportion](#) of young teachers in the OECD. The OECD average for under-30s is 12.7% of primary and 9.2% of secondary teachers.”

### **3.6 Contracts, Pay and Conditions**

Fixed terms contracts still occasionally emerge as an issue. Some are connected to the employment of overseas staff and sponsorship of visas. Unions discourage fixed term contracts unless there is a compelling reason to use them. The STPCD made it clear that by September 2026, all TLRs should be paid in their entirety to the member of staff to whom they are awarded if they have full responsibility for that subject area. The pro rata principle for part time staff should not exist beyond this point. Some schools have already adopted this early and the union makes it clear to its members that such workplaces are to be credited as good employers.

The unions<sup>13</sup> flag the benefits of flexible working and how the STPCD has attempted to emphasise this recently. ACAS also has some useful guidance.<sup>14</sup> Whilst the nature of teaching means that working from home options are not as straight forward, especially in secondaries, as other professions, the issue is ignored at our peril in terms of recruitment and retention. Most local workplaces have at last opted to allow much greater flexibility around using PPA as work from home option, and this is to be welcomed. If it isn't offered, it makes one school a far less attractive prospect when compared to one that does and, as ever, the union reminds its members to be mindful of this.

### **3.7 Grievances**

There has been no notable increase in the number of grievances in the last year. Union intervention means that they continue to be managed via advice before escalation. When they do become formal, they are often time consuming and divisive. They are certainly not to be encouraged but sometimes do become the only remaining option for staff and the union does have a duty to support members if they choose it.

### **3.8 Settlements**

There have been a few settlement agreements this year. They are often time consuming and expensive but occur when relations between employer and employee break down beyond repair and often offer the best solution for all parties to move on.

### **3.9 Governance**

Having good governors in place is vital and the union enthusiastically recommends that as much training as possible is offered. Conversely, poor governance can create more problems than it solves and can make processes protracted, especially in relation to breaches of policy and employment law if governors do not know the details, or indeed, understand them.

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<sup>13</sup> [Flexible working | National Education Union](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Code of Practice on requests for flexible working | Acas](#)

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### 3.10 Collective Issues

Around this time of year the issue of gained time emerges. What staff can be asked to do used to be clearer, but it remains nebulous and we urge members to accept what is reasonable. Gained time should work in tandem with rarely cover and making staff aware of what is going on and what is deemed reasonable can avoid this becoming a divisive issue.

Mandatory training being done in staff's own time can also be an issue and we advise our members that it should only be undertaken as part of directed time.

### 3.11 LA Polices and Guidance and Negotiating Forum

Rationalising the approach to dealing with policies that need reviewing was always discussed at ECM. Key policy documents are prioritised and unions meet separately in order to give them proper scrutiny.

The unions also welcome the fact that a new negotiating forum has been established JNCC (Joint Negotiating and Consultation Committee) which replaces ECM. It has a clearer and stronger remit and the unions are very grateful in particular to Olimpia Byrne from HR for all her hard work in making this happen.

## 4. Conclusion

Schools that continue to contribute to facility time demonstrate that they value their workforce and the support that the teaching unions offer. With a lack of workplace reps, support from experienced caseworkers is crucial. A school which supports and recognises the constructive role that unions play makes itself a far more appealing prospect as an employer and we would argue gives those schools a competitive edge in a demanding recruitment market place and is also a strong influence over staff retention which is arguably just as important.

## 5. Appendices

### 5.1 Appendix A – Letter to Heads of schools who do not contribute to school facilities:

*Dear Headteacher*

*We are experiencing a significant increase in members contacting us for help and advice, along with requests for support at meetings.*

*You may not be aware that NEU branches do not have paid case workers to do this job.*

*Instead, schools contribute to a pooled resource pot which is used to release teachers who are elected officers of the branch – West Berkshire in your case. It is called facility time.*

*All local authority schools contribute to this.*

*Unfortunately, some schools in West Berkshire do not have work place reps. This is where local officers can help.*

*Employers have a statutory obligation under the Employment Relations Act 1999 to enable their employees to be properly supported in the workplace.*

*Contributing to the facility time pot has many advantages:*

- Effective workplace mechanisms which help perceptions of fairness and countering discrimination*
  - Union representatives who have experience in representing members and have been trained to do so*
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- *Co-operation when dealing with the exponential growth over recent years in legislation and guidance covering schools*
- *Trade union facility time is usually far less than comparable management time and subsequent costs e.g. HR, consultants, lawyers*
- *Hidden costs to morale in terms of excluding or limiting trade union voice*
- *The positive contribution that is made by involving educators via their trade union. This was clearly demonstrated and more widely appreciated during the pandemic*
- *The increasingly complex issues that students face that educators are expected to deal with*
- *Recognizing the commitment that the new government made in their manifesto page (p16) to 'ensure there is sufficient facilities time for all trade union reps so that they have capacity to represent and defend workers, negotiate with employers and train'.*

*Even if a school has a rep, there are often occasions when they do not have the time, expertise or experience to deal with some cases or may be uncomfortable supporting colleagues in confidential matters.*

*We would ask that, at the very least, you encourage a member of your staff who is in the NEU to stand as a rep if you don't have one and give them some protected time to discharge their responsibilities*

*Ideally, we ask that you contribute to the facilities time pot so that you have timely access to the support of branch officers. The amount paid is calculated based on the number of pupils at the school. You can contribute even if your school does not have a trade union recognition agreement. We would, however, urge you to adopt one.*

*We support all of our members at all schools, but we are unable to offer timely support at meetings to schools who do not contribute to the facility pot any longer given increase in workload. This will mean that we will need to request a postponement for meeting requests of at least 5 working days, offering alternative dates when a paid Regional Officer is available. The delay may be longer if the request cannot be reasonably accommodated. Delays create further stress for all involved.*

*If you would like to contribute to the facility pot you can do so by arranging this with West Berkshire LA and contacting [hfforschools@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:hfforschools@westberks.gov.uk)*

*Should you wish to discuss this proposal in more detail, please contact Richard Hand and/or Keith Watts at the e mail addresses below.*

*[Richard.hand@neu.org.uk](mailto:Richard.hand@neu.org.uk)*

*[Keith.Watts@neu.org.uk](mailto:Keith.Watts@neu.org.uk)*

*Yours sincerely*

*Richard Hand*

*Keith Watts*

*Joint District and Branch Secretaries, West Berkshire NEU*

**Please also see footnotes**

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